are foredoomed to an isolated and loveless existence. Little Maisie is acute and perceptive; she observes, 'knows', and, in the process, becomes corrupt herself.

The selfish and sensual Ida Farange quarrels with her greedy and lustful husband Beale, and is divorced when Maisie is six years old. Both sue for the custody of the child, and the court decrees that they shall have the child alternately for six-month periods. This arrangement suits admirably their purpose of 'cursed spite', and they indoctrinate the child with feelings of hatred for each other. For them she is just a little porcelain cup in which biting acids can be mixed, not one of their own flesh and blood, to whom they ought to be bound by a sense of natural affection and duty. The painted creature, Ida, marries Sir Claude, while Beale marries Maisie's attractive governess, Overmore. The sensual Ida soon tires of Claude and has a succession of lovers, and on grounds of illhealth she finally entrusts Maisie to Sir Claude. Beale soon baits a rich American lady, Mrs. Cuddon, a 'short, fat, wheedling person', and extends an insincere invitation to Maisie to accompany him and his latest consort to America. Maisie declines the invitation because she sees through her father's insincerity. Sir Claude too has a weakness for women. He and Mrs. Beale are lovers, and it is for the sake of Mrs. Beale that Claude finally gives up Maisie to whom he is much attached.

Mrs. Wix, the governess of Maisie, is equally selfish. Her devotion to Maisie is motivated by selfish reasons, and is a means of ensuring steady employment for her. She fears that Maisie would be wholly entrusted to Claude and Mrs. Beale and remarks to Maisie, "They'll take you, they'll take you, and what in the world will then become of me?"[1A] The poor governess, who has lost her own child, reveals a possessive maternal instinct which is at once fascinating and frightening to the innocent Maisie. Mrs. Wix "shares in the universal sin of selfhood. And with the rest of James's Londoners she inhabits a

fallen world, where evil is normal and good perverse, where total good is a fiction, where the sensitive moral person cannot exist."[1] In other words, James dramatises in her the subtle evil of being too good.

As little Maisie advances from childhood to adolescence in a world of social grossness, personal depravity and moral ugliness, she **comes** to 'know' things. When she realises that she is being used as 9 messenger of abuse by her parents, she cleverly practises the